

Public Works Committee
Tuesday, June 29, 2010
Town Room, Town Hall

Attendance:

Committee: Steve Braun (chair), Charlie Moran, Michael Cann, Donald George, Vince O'Connor, Rob Crowner, Christine Gray-Mullen, Guilford Mooring (staff).

Members of the general public: Barb April, Meg Kroeplin, Sharon Povinelli, Robin Morris, Aubin Tyler, Peter Kibbler, Ryan Quinn, Roy Barnett, Susan Norton, Alan Snow.

1. Administrative matters: Steve calls the meeting to order at 7:01pm, welcoming new member Christine and acknowledging the conclusion of the terms of Vince and Rob. The committee approves the minutes of the June 1, 2010 meeting by a vote of 5-0 with two abstentions due to absence from the meeting. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 3 and will feature a public hearing on the University Drive/Big Y project and a committee recommendation on the Sand Hill Road project.

Charlie notes that Guilford has offered to record future meetings for transcription by DPW staff in lieu of minute-taking by committee members, but states that he (Charlie) would prefer that the committee continue to produce its own minutes -- ideally by rotating the responsibility among several members -- in order to save staff time.

2. Updates:

a. Atkins: Guilford reports that most of the town's part of the project is done (sewer and water lines) and that the state part goes out to bid July 3, with the contract to be awarded by September 30. Work should begin this Fall and could be finished within a year, though it is listed as a two-year job. Traffic will not have to be detoured through most of the project because it can be done in phases. Guilford will bring an estimate of the town's investment in the project to the next meeting.

b. Route 116: Guilford reports that the Crocker Farm to Pomeroy Lane segment will be the next part to be worked on, but the state's contractor is currently on another job. Almost all of the adjustments in the existing right-of-way have already been done.

c. Lincoln Avenue: Guilford reports that the DPW has obtained the traffic analysis data from UMass and will be meeting in early July with the Town Manager to review it. Guilford summarizes the findings as showing that people continued to use Lincoln Avenue in the morning, with afternoon traffic being reduced.

3. Public hearing: Sand Hill Road.

Guilford presents the current design proposal for the south end of Sand Hill Road, from Puffer's Circle to Pine Street. Sand Hill Road was never constructed to any standard and there is no real base, making this a complicated project. Though it does not have to be brought up to current town standards, the design reflects compromises between varying interests in the road, which will ultimately have to be resolved by the Select Board. The proposal does not address the north end of the road because drainage issues will require extensive permitting and a Chapter 97 hearing at the state legislature. This part of the project is still being developed and will be implemented at some future date, though if possible the town will apply a topcoat this year for temporary relief.

The current width of the road is 16 to 18 feet (town standard is 22 to 24 feet). The proposal calls for a 20-foot road. New features include a bus stop with pulloff on Pine Street just west of Sand Hill Road, a sidewalk from the bus stop to the Ray Stannard Baker trailhead halfway up the hill (which would require the removal of seven trees), and a drainage system that would tie in to Pine Street and a

detention basin behind Rosemary and Lilac Lanes (currently, there are only stand-alone catch basins on Sand Hill Road). The existing road material will be reground to make a base and then two additional coats will be applied for a total of eight inches.

Vince states that he has been told that installing drainage and then paving the north end of the road up to State Street might be preferable to merely overcoating the road because at least some particulates could be sequestered by the drainage, rather than be directed to sensitive areas by a topcoat, but Guilford states that concentrating overflow at a single point at the intersection (as Vince's suggestion implies) may result in dangerous ice dams in the winter. The DPW would prefer to take the drainage all the way to its ultimate destination when this side of the project is done.

Comments: (Meg Kroeplin) The Rosemary/Lilac Lane neighbors currently pay to have the pipes behind their development cleaned. They are concerned about adding drainage from Sand Hill Road. (Guilford) The system was designed and permitted for public use and would be maintained by the town if it is used for Sand Hill Road.

(Barb April) The north side topcoat should be done this year in addition to the south side project. (Guilford) There is no record of a complete resurfacing for at least eighty years. (Vince) It was resurfaced in the early 1990s, but soon began falling apart.

(Peter Kibbler) Smoothing out the road will lead to faster traffic; keeping the road narrow will help mitigate this. (Guilford) The road can't be made narrower than it already is and the current proposal is a modification (narrowing) of the original proposal. (Vince) Use traffic cop of speed reporting device to encourage slower traffic as was successfully done on East Leverett Road when it was resurfaced.

(Alan Snow, tree warden) The total "diameter-at-breast-height" (DBH) of the trees proposed to be removed is more than 100 inches, with very little replacement. Trees intercept and then soak up a lot of rainwater; removing trees increases the cost of dealing with drainage. The shade provided by trees prolongs the life of a road. Removal of trees and construction of sidewalk would harm the "scenic road" designation of Sand Hill Road. Trees and people help provide traffic calming. Permeable paving should be used where feasible, such as at the State Street intersection. Road work encourages erosion. The width of the road should be maintained as is (changing classification of the road if necessary), no trees should be removed, and the sidewalk should not be constructed.

(Guilford) Permeable paving is a little more expensive and not as readily available as conventional paving, but has been successful even in winter and is therefore practical for Amherst. The key factor is that the base has to be prepared so that the water can drain down and not form a layer under the permeable material that, in freezing weather, would cause the material to crack and buckle.

Several commenters discuss whether there is currently pedestrian traffic on the road (or through the trees on the side of the road) to the trailhead and to Puffer's Pond, without consensus, and whether a sidewalk is necessary to make the trailhead more accessible. (Vince) The Conservation Commission should improve and mark the trail so as to take some people off the road. (Roy Barnett) People abuse the trail with litter, dogs, noise, etc.; greater use should not be encouraged. (Ryan Quinn) The sidewalk would help get people off the road and onto the trail in the most dangerous spot.

(Don) Roads without curbs or sidewalks don't always get plowed all the way to the edge, effectively narrowing the road in the winter. (Guilford) This varies depending on the overall level of development in the area; a less-finished roadway such as Sand Hill Road probably would get plowed all the way to the edge.

(Ryan Quinn) Supports the current, scaled-back plan, after having opposed the initial proposals. Is not opposed to leaving the road on his property, but favors the current plan, which moves it off his land. The trees that could be saved by keeping the road on his property do not seem "compelling".

Guilford states that there will either be an ADA-compliant sidewalk or nothing; i.e., there cannot be an unpaved path in lieu of a sidewalk. In any case, at least three trees will have to be

removed or significantly damaged even if the road is repaved "in place".

Guilford reports that the residents of #7 Sand Hill Road (the property over which the sidewalk would extend) have indicated satisfaction with the proposal.

Steve states that the committee will make its recommendation at its August 3 meeting, after which the proposal will go before the Select Board for a decision.

4. Traffic light at East Pleasant Street/Eastman Lane intersection: Guilford states that the Select Board has requested public discussion of and committee input on the installation of a traffic light at this intersection, which has been proposed by UMass. A consultant has stated that the standards for a traffic light are present now, though the town believes that they won't be met until the new UMass police station opens next Spring. UMass will pay for the light, while the town will handle installation. It will be video-controlled, as all new traffic lights are, and there will be a "fire button" for emergency vehicles. Work will begin in the Fall and be complete by February, when the police station is scheduled to open. Intersection redesign, including possible turn lanes, will be brought forward in the future.

Vince is concerned that the video system will not account for right turns from Eastman Lane to East Pleasant Street, potentially stopping East Pleasant Street traffic unnecessarily, but Guilford states that the sensor will have a built-in delay and won't trigger a stop unless the right turn driver takes too long to make the turn.

Don moves, Charlie seconds, and the committee votes unanimously to recommend approval of this project.

5. Spring Street: Steve notes that the Disability Access Advisory Committee and the Design Review Board have each submitted comments on the Spring Street proposal, which received a public hearing at the June 1 PWC meeting. Guilford states that WMECO is preparing a cost quote for undergrounding the utilities from Boltwood to Churchill, though the proposal under consideration does not include underground utilities.

Vince moves, Charlie seconds to recommend approval of the proposed design on Spring Street from Boltwood to Churchill, and if funds not allocated to another DPW project become available, that the Committee favors burial of the utilities. The committee votes in favor 5-0 with two abstentions due to absence from the public hearing.

6. Adjournment: The meeting is adjourned at 9:16pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Rob Crowner